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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE IV.

THE DATE OF THE APOCALYPSE.

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IN the case of many books of Scripture the question of date is not one of mere historic interest, but is intimately related to the larger questions of authenticity and interpretation. It is obvious, for example, what a changed aspect the Pentateuch and the prophecy of Daniel would wear, if critical research should compel us to refer them to a period long subsequent to the days of the Exodus and the Captivity.

The *authorship* of the Apocalypse is not determined by the time of its composition, for the dates that divide the suffrages of the learned world fall alike within the life of John the apostle, by whom it was certainly written, as the voice of antiquity attests. But it is maintained that the date furnishes the key to the *meaning* of the book. It must be interpreted from the standpoint of the seer, and cannot be understood unless we rightly apprehend the circumstances under which it was given to the church. To see as John saw we must take our stand where John stood. The vision is intelligible from no other point of view. The question of time, therefore, is one of first importance, as it determines the exposition of the book.

Two dates only need concern us, for between them our choice must be made.

A. Tradition assigns the Apocalypse to the close of the reign of Domitian (95 or 96 A. D.). This date was generally accepted down to the present century, and is still maintained by many critics, as Trench, Alford, Milligan, Lee, Elliott, Hengstenberg, Lange, Godet, Ebrard, Warfield,¹ and generally in Smith's Bible Dictionary.

¹ Schaff-Herzog Encyclopædia, and *Pres. Review*, April, 1884.

B. The majority of scholars now assign it to a period shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, in the reign of Nero, Galba, or Vespasian (68–70). This is declared to be one of the most certain results of modern criticism, and is maintained by Weiss, Gebhardt, Luthardt, Olshausen, Stier, Gieseler, Westcott, Lightfoot, Salmon, Farrar, Plumptre, Schaff, Stuart, Reuss, Meyer, Ewald, Bleek, DeWette, Davidson, Düsterdieck, of whom the seven last named hold that the Apocalypse was not written by John the apostle, or at least that the fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse are not from the same hand.

It is the purpose of this article to advocate a return to the earlier view, which refers the book to the close of the first century, and in the course of the argument to present the objections to current schemes of interpretation.

The evidence is of two kinds: 1st. External—the witness of the early church; 2d. Internal—the witness of the book itself. Of these let us treat in order.

THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE.

The most important witness is Irenæus. In commenting upon Rev. xiii. 18, he says: “For if it were necessary that the name of him [antichrist] should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been told by him who saw the apocalyptic vision (*δι' ἐκείνου ἂν ἐρρέθη τοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν ἑωρακότος*). For it was seen no long time ago, but almost in our generation, toward the end of Domitian's reign (*οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἑωράθη, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς, πρὸς τῷ τέλει τῆς Δομετιανοῦ ἀρχῆς*).”

Three attempts have been made to break the force of these words.

1st. It is said that the Latin translation of the third or fourth century renders *ἑωράθη* by *visum est*, indicating a neuter subject, the beast, and not *ἡ ἀποκάλυψις*.

2d. It is urged that *Δομετιανοῦ* is an adjective, referring to Domitius Nero.

*Adv. Hær., Book v. chap. xxx. sect. 3.

3d. It is argued that not the Apocalypse, but *he*, that is John, is the subject of *ἑωράθη*. The use of *ἑωραχότος* immediately before, however, makes the reference to the Apocalypse clear. Moreover, if John were the subject, as it is the object of Irenæus to bring the matter as near his own time as possible, he would not have said that John was seen toward the close of Domitian's reign, but in the reign of Trajan, which Irenæus knew that he reached.³

It is a sufficient answer to all these forced interpretations, that the early church always understood the words of Irenæus in their plain and obvious meaning, nor would any other have been suggested if his testimony had not been a stumbling-block in the way of modern exposition. That Irenæus refers the Apocalypse to the reign of Domitian is generally admitted by scholars of all shades of opinion.

Certainly Irenæus might be mistaken. He tells us, with an appeal to those who had seen John and the other apostles, that Christ reached the age of nearly fifty years,⁴ a statement clearly erroneous. But upon this point Irenæus was not likely to mistake. He gives us a pleasant picture of his intercourse with Polycarp, the pupil of John:—

For I have a more vivid recollection of what occurred at that time than of recent events. . . . So that I can even describe the place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse, his going out, too, and his coming in, his general mode of life and personal appearance, together with the discourses which he delivered to the people; also how he would speak of his familiar intercourse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how he would call their words to remembrance. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to his miracles and his teaching, Polycarp having thus received [information] from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all in harmony with the Scriptures. These things, through God's mercy which was upon me, I then listened to attentively, and treasured them up not on paper, but in my heart; and I am continually, by God's grace, revolving these things accurately in my mind.⁵

³ *Ibid.*, Book iii. chap. iii. sect. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Book ii. chap. xxii. sects. 5, 6.

⁵ Ep. to Florinus, H. E., Book v. chap. xx.

His great work "Against Heresies," from which the passage under discussion is taken, was written between 180 and 190. Regarding his position and trustworthiness it is sufficient to quote the words of Canon Westcott: "He stood forth to maintain no novelties, but to vindicate what had been believed of old. . . . The great work of Irenæus . . . is the sole considerable monument of the literature of the churches of Asia Minor from the time of Polycarp to that of Gregory of Neo-Cæsarea or even of Basil."⁶ And the words of Dr. Schaff: "Irenæus is the leading representative of Catholic Christianity in the last quarter of the second century, the champion of orthodoxy against Gnostic heresy, and the mediator between the Eastern and Western churches. He united a learned Greek education and philosophical penetration with practical wisdom and moderation. He is neither very original nor brilliant, but eminently sound and judicious. . . . He is perfectly at home in the Greek Bible and in the early Christian writers. . . . His position gives him additional weight, for he is linked by two long lives, that of his teacher and grand teacher, to the fountain-head of Christianity."⁷ In this estimate of his character there is general agreement. Note further that Irenæus had made some special study of the Apocalypse, as is shown by his reference to different manuscripts that had come under his notice,⁸ and by his exposition of various passages: and his evidence is seen to be very weighty.

But we do not rest upon the word of Irenæus alone. Let us summon the remaining witnesses in order.

Clement of Alexandria (150-220) says only, that, upon the death of *the tyrant*, John returned from Patmos to Ephesus.⁹ Eusebius understood that by *the tyrant*, Clement meant

⁶Canon of the New Testament, pp. 341, 381.

⁷History of the Christian Church, Vol. ii. pp. 750, 751.

⁸Adv. Hær., Book v. chap. xxx. sect. 1.

⁹Quis dives, chap. xlii.

Domitian, and cites him with Irenæus as a witness to that effect.¹⁰

Tertullian, contemporary with Clement, gives no certain testimony; though he speaks of persecutions under both Nero and Domitian. He says: "Domitian, too, a man of Nero's type in cruelty, tried his hand at persecution; but as he had something of the human in him, he soon put an end to what he had begun, even restoring again those whom he had banished."¹¹ Eusebius quotes these words, and adds: "But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years, and Nero succeeded to the government, the Roman senate decreed that the honors of Domitian should be revoked, and that those who had been unjustly expelled should return to their homes, and have their goods restored." "This is the statement of the historians of the day," says Eusebius. "It was then, also, that the apostle John returned from his banishment in Patmos, and took up his abode at Ephesus, according to an ancient tradition of the church."¹² It is plain that Eusebius understood Tertullian in harmony with the prevailing tradition, which placed the exile and the Apocalypse in the reign of Domitian.

Again, Tertullian says, "How happy is its church [the church in Rome], on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's [*i. e.*, John the Baptist]! where the apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile!"¹³ The words obviously contain no indication that the martyrdom of Peter and Paul and the persecution of John occurred at the same time, but only that they occurred in the same place.

Jerome, indeed, in citing this passage refers it to the

¹⁰ H. E., Book iii. chap. xxiii.

¹¹ Apology, chap. v.

¹² H. E., Book iii. chap. xx.

¹³ De Præscript. Hær., chap. xxxvi.

time of Nero¹⁴. But (1) The words of Tertullian contain no note of time; (2) Eusebius understands Tertullian to refer the exile of John to the reign of Domitian; (3) Jerome himself in the same paragraph places the exile under Domitian; (4) The legend of the oil-bath is itself apocryphal. It is evident that, in quoting Tertullian, Jerome did not associate the oil-bath with the exile.

The Muratorian Canon, which probably dates from about 170, says that "Paul, following the rule of his predecessor John, writes to no more than seven churches by name." If this means, as some assert, that John's letters to the seven churches were written before Paul wrote to the churches under his care, then the Apocalypse must have been earlier at least than the last epistle Paul addressed to a church, the Epistle to the Philippians, written in the year 62 or 63. But that is impossible, for the persecution under Nero did not break out until the year 64. It is obvious, as Westcott notes,¹⁵ that John may be called the predecessor of Paul simply because he was an apostle before him.

Origen (185-253), in commenting upon Matt. xvi. 6, uses these words: "And the King of the Romans, as tradition teaches, condemned John, bearing witness for the sake of the word of truth, to the island of Patmos. And John teaches concerning his witness, not saying who condemned him." Origen contrasts tradition with Scripture. The tradition to which he alludes must have been that handed down from Irenæus, for up to this time there is no trace of any other in the church.

The first commentator on the Apocalypse of whom we have knowledge is Victorinus, Bishop of Petavium, who suffered martyrdom under Diocletian, 303. Commenting upon the eleventh verse of chapter x., he remarks: "He says this, because when John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the labor of the mines by

¹⁴ Adv. Jov., Book i. chap. xxvi.

¹⁵ Canon of the New Testament. Appendix C.

Cæsar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse." And upon xvii. 10, "The time must be understood in which the written Apocalypse was published, since then reigned Cæsar Domitian; but before him had been Titus, his brother, and Vespasian, Otho, Vitellius, and Galba. These are the five who have fallen. One remains, under whom the Apocalypse was written—Domitian, to wit." The work of Victorinus has been interpolated, but his witness upon this point is not in doubt.

Eusebius (260-340), "to whose zeal we owe most of what is known of the history of the New Testament,"¹⁶ the father of church history, several times expressly refers the Apocalypse to the reign of Domitian.¹⁷ The witness of Eusebius is of great weight, for he "had almost all the Christian literature of the first century at command."¹⁸ Evidently he knew of no other tradition than that which assigned the Apocalypse to the time of Domitian.

It is true that Eusebius was in doubt whether the Apocalypse was the work of John the apostle; but his doubt rested apparently upon internal grounds alone, and does not impair the fidelity with which he preserved the traditions of the church.

The first break in the prevailing tradition is made by Epiphanius, who was chosen Bishop of Salamis in 367. Twice he asserts that John was banished under Claudius, who died in the year 54.¹⁹ And he declares that at that time John was ninety years of age, and then wrote his Gospel. Epiphanius was notoriously inaccurate; and his statement is so widely at variance with all tradition besides, that, with the notable exception of Grotius, scarcely any scholar has been found to accept it.

Jerome (340-419) says: "In the fourteenth year, therefore, Domitian setting in motion the second persecution after

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁷ H. E., Book iii. chap. xviii., xx., xxiii.,—book v. chap. viii.; Chron. ii.

¹⁸ Luthardt, John, Author of the Fourth Gospel, p. 37.

¹⁹ *Haer.*, chap. li. sect. xii—chap. xxxiii.

Nero, John, banished to the island of Patmos, wrote the Apocalypse, which Justin Martyr and Irenæus interpret."²⁰ The apocryphal acts of John, of uncertain date, and Orosius and Sulpicius Severus, early in the fifth century, follow the tradition, which remains unbroken, but for the blunder of Epiphanius, for three hundred years.

Andreas, Bishop of Cæsarea in Cappadocia, probably toward the close of the fifth century, from whom we have the first continuous commentary on the Apocalypse, remarks that some refer vi. 12 and vii. 1 to the destruction of Jerusalem, but he refers them to the time of antichrist.²¹

Arethas, whom some reckon of the sixth century, but others, as Dr. Schaff, following Otto and Harnack, of the tenth,²² in commenting upon i. 9, quotes the passage already noted from the Chronicle of Eusebius, without expressing his own opinion. Upon vi. 12, he remarks that some refer the earthquake to the time of Vespasian, but most interpreters to the time of antichrist. Upon vii. 4, he says that the destruction wrought by the Romans had not yet overtaken the Jews, when the evangelist prophesied these things. Arethas appears to have been in some confusion regarding the date, but the last quotation is the clearest expression of his own belief.

It is well known that the Peshito, the oldest Syriac version of the New Testament, does not contain the Apocalypse. But the title-page of a Syriac version of the Apocalypse in the sixth century declares that it was written by John in Patmos, whither he was banished by Nero. If we assign

²⁰ De Vir. Ill., chap. ix.

²¹ In face of the fact that Victorinus expressly and repeatedly ascribes the Apocalypse to the reign of Domitian, and that Andreas gives no opinion regarding its date, Canon Farrar says, "The earliest apocalyptic commentators, as well as the Syriac and Theophylact, all place the writing of the Apocalypse in the reign of Nero." (Early Days of Christianity, chap. xxvii. sect. 1, p. 408.) His whole treatment of the external evidence is inaccurate and misleading. Professor Salmon notes a striking instance (Introduction to New Testament, sect. 14, p. 294 note).

²² History of the Christian Church, Vol. i. p. 825.

Arethas to the tenth century, this is the first unequivocal witness, except Epiphanius, to the early date of the book.

Theophylact, in the preface to his commentary on the Gospel of John, says that John, being an exile in the island of Patmos, wrote his Gospel thirty-two years after the ascension of Christ, thus placing the exile in the reign of Nero. Much stress is laid upon this evidence by certain advocates of the early date, yet it is of little value. For (1) Theophylact belonged to the eleventh century; (2) He is not speaking of the Apocalypse, but of the Gospel, and the Gospel was certainly not written at the time he indicates; (3) Theophylact himself, in commenting upon Matt. xx. 23, says that John was condemned by Trajan. This is the testimony—so late, so contradictory, so demonstrably untrue—that we are asked to set against the word of Irenæus.

These are all the witnesses of any weight whatever that testify to the early date. It is proposed to set aside the testimony of Irenæus, Victorinus, Eusebius, and Jerome, in favor of the Syriac version, Arethas, and Theophylact. The simple truth is, there is no respectable evidence for the early date. When witnesses are summoned from the tenth and eleventh centuries, the case is plainly hopeless.

But it is alleged that the tradition rests upon the testimony of Irenæus alone, so that we have not many witnesses, but one. If that were true, the single word of Irenæus would far outweigh all the contrary evidence that is adduced. There is no man in the early church upon whose word we should more confidently rest than upon the word of Irenæus, no one better qualified to speak with authority here. But there is other witness. Eusebius must be our guide, and he appeals to Clement of Alexandria with Irenæus to prove that John returned from Patmos after the death of Domitian,²³ and to "an ancient tradition of the church."²⁴ Eusebius found the tradition wide-spread and

²³ H. E., Book iii. chap. xxiii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. xx.

generally entertained in the church, and he does not refer it to Irenæus alone, though his witness was the most weighty.

It may be added, by way of corroborative evidence, that banishment was a common sentence under Domitian,²⁵ while, under Nero, John would probably have suffered death with Paul and Peter, if we admit that the persecution under Nero extended to the provinces.

Such is the evidence—so weighty, so widely distributed—which ascribes the Apocalypse to the reign of Domitian. It is possible that tradition may be in error, but that tradition favors the later date is simply indisputable. This is admitted by many scholars who yet hold the early date on internal grounds. Thus Dr. Schaff says: "The prevailing, we may say the only distinct, tradition, beginning with so respectable a witness as Irenæus, about 170, assigns the exile to the end of the reign of Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96."²⁶

We proceed to examine—

THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

This is of two kinds: I.—The evidence drawn from specific passages; II.—The evidence drawn from the general style and character of the book.

I.—*The evidence drawn from specific passages.* Stress is laid upon the word *shortly* (ἐν τάχει) in i. 1. It must refer to events immediately at hand,—the fall of Jerusalem, the fortunes of the Roman empire under Nero and his successors. But certainly the word cannot be literally applied to the theme of the book, the second coming of Christ, and it is satisfied by a general reference to the Empire, of which the future is disclosed. That it is not inconsistent with a considerable lapse of time is plain from Luke xviii., where ἐν τάχει of verse 8 must allow room for μακροθυμίᾳ of verse 7. And further, the application of the term to the second advent is in harmony with the teaching of Scripture. The

²⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. xvii., xviii.; Tac. Agric. 45.

²⁶ History of the Christian Church, Vol. i. p. 427.

early church regarded the coming of Christ as always imminent, though they knew not the day and hour of His appearing. The apostles constantly appealed to it as a motive to patience, to courage, to endurance.²⁷ Were the apostles mistaken? Whatever their personal hope or expectation, their teaching was in accord with the truth. For (1) they claim to have no definite knowledge of the time. Only as the Lord taught them they look upon his coming as always impending. (2) There are many comings of Christ, all pointing forward to his glorious advent. Death is to the individual soul what that advent shall be to the world—the time of judgment. Every display of divine wrath is the shadow that the great judgment-day casts before. Predictions fulfilled only in that day find a secondary accomplishment in events that are typical of the end. (3) Scripture gives us the divine standard by which to measure time—“One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter iii. 8). God does not reckon time by the clock.

We may then apply this word *shortly* in the literal sense to the future of the Roman empire, as here foreshadowed; or we may take a wider view, and apply it to the whole contents of the book down to the second advent, according to principles (2) and (3) laid down above.

Appeal is made to the words, “the things which are” (i. 19). But here, again, the phrase is amply satisfied by a reference to the Roman empire, or to the epistles to the seven churches.

These, however, are minor arguments. It is urged, with the utmost confidence, that in the eleventh chapter the temple in Jerusalem is represented as still standing. Hence the book was written before the city was destroyed.

But even if it be the literal temple that appears, does the conclusion follow? If the vision of the temple proves that the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, does

²⁷ Phil. iv. 5; James v. 8; 1 Peter iv. 7; 1 John ii. 18.

the vision of the woman and the child in chapter xii. prove that it was written before the birth of Christ? Evidently the seer is looking backward in the one instance; why not in the other? By what right is it assumed that the date of any particular vision gives the date of the book?

But passing by this point to enter upon the question of interpretation, we discover that this is not the literal temple. The measuring of the worshippers indicates at once that the whole is symbolic. Moreover, upon this theory, what explanation can be given of the command to measure the temple, the altar, and the worshippers, but to leave out the court, and measure it not? Whether the measuring denotes preservation or destruction, a clear distinction is drawn. Part is to be preserved, and part destroyed. But at the capture of the city the whole was involved in indiscriminate ruin. We must believe that John was ignorant or forgetful of the prediction of the Lord (Mark xiii. 2), and proved himself a false prophet. So Bleek declares, "A destruction of the city and of the temple itself is not spoken of here; it is even signified unmistakably that they shall be placed under God's immediate protection Rather is the hope expressed . . . that even the temple may remain safe, without being profaned by heathens."²⁸ Yet this book, containing a prediction so soon and so signally falsified, was received by the church as true, authoritative, and inspired. Credulity could go no further.

And again, upon this theory what is made of the two witnesses? The greater part of the chapter is devoted to them. They are the prominent actors in the whole scene. Do we find any trace of them in the siege of Jerusalem? Josephus has given us a detailed account of it, yet there is not the faintest indication of anything resembling what is here portrayed. The witnesses wrought great miracles; after they were slain, from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations men looked upon their dead bodies three days and a half; they that dwelt on the earth rejoiced

²⁸ Lectures on the Apocalypse, pp. 106, 107.

because they were rid of their tormentors; after the three days and a half they stood upon their feet, and ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them. This is not a mere episode. The witnesses are the central figures of the scene. Yet no historical research or exegetical skill can find or frame an explanation of the passage upon the supposition that the seer is predicting the capture of Jerusalem.

The theory that the literal temple is represented, halts at the first verse, breaks down at the second, and confesses its utter inability to go further at the third.

But it is said that if John wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem, he must have referred to it. A similar argument has been urged to prove that John could not have written the first Epistle that bears his name.²⁹ John does not mention the capture of the city, because there was no occasion; but we may believe that it furnished, in part at least, the terrible imagery in which the downfall of Babylon is portrayed.

By a large number of critics the stress of the argument for the early date is laid upon the identification of the beast with the emperor Nero. This is declared to be conclusive. The key of the book, long lost, has been recovered.

That the beast is Nero is the prevailing opinion among German scholars, and is endorsed by the recent edition of Grimm's New Testament Lexicon, edited by Professor Thayer (see *ἀντιχριστός*).

The passages mainly relied upon are three.

And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death stroke was healed: and the whole earth wondered after the beast (xiii. 1-3 Rev. Ver.).

In close connection with this passage stands xvii. 8-11:—

²⁹ Lücke, Commentary on Eps. of John, Introd., chap. i.

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come. Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth: and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition.

Who or what is represented by the beast? The leading interpretations are: 1. The world power in general, as in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. ii.), embodied in successive kingdoms denoted by the seven heads. 2. The Roman empire, which appeared to receive a mortal wound in the death of Nero, but was restored by Vespasian. 3. The papacy. 4. Most modern German scholars, with many followers in England and America, identify the beast with the emperor Nero.

With this last opinion we are now concerned, because of its bearing upon the time of the composition of the book. We shall not stop to ask again whether the date of the writing may be drawn from the date of the vision, but proceed at once to the question of interpretation.

The characteristic marks of the beast are two, and these, it is affirmed, point unmistakably to the Roman empire and to Nero.

(1) The enigmatic utterance regarding the wound and recovery of the beast is explained by the popular belief that Nero should rise from the dead and resume the empire. That such a superstition was at one time wide-spread among Christians and heathen alike is certain. The original form of it seems to have been, not that Nero was dead and should rise again, but that he had escaped the hands of his enemies, and taken refuge in Parthia, whence he should return to wreak vengeance upon Rome. But we may admit that the correspondence between the prevalent belief and the vision of John is close enough to furnish adequate foundation for the theory.

(2) The seven heads are seven kings; five are fallen, one is, one is yet to come. This, we are told, points to the very emperor in whose reign the book was written.

The indication is not precise enough indeed to point all critics of the same school to the same conclusion. Some, following Suetonius and Josephus, begin with Julius Cæsar, and reckon Nero the sixth, under whom John wrote. The majority begin with Augustus, and make Galba the sixth; while others, omitting Galba, Otho, and Vitellius as usurpers, give the sixth place to Vespasian. Yet there is no great difference of time involved, for only about eighteen months intervened between Nero and Vespasian, and the composition of the book in any case, therefore, is placed shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem.

The theory is, then, that Nero is the beast, mortally wounded but restored to life, about to return after the seven kings have finished their course.

There are two insuperable objections.

(1) The theory ascribes to John a false prophecy based upon a silly superstition. Nero is to ascend the throne as the eighth king. Nothing could be further from the truth. Galba, Otho, and Vitellius followed in quick succession, and Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian left no place for Nero. Many expositions of the Apocalypse once held in high esteem are now forgotten, or remembered only as monuments of folly, because their predictions have not come to pass; but the Apocalypse itself, though this prophecy and that of chapter xi. were proved false within the lifetime of the author, even within a few months after they were uttered, was yet received by the churches as true, authoritative, and inspired. Either they attached to it another meaning, or they were sadly indifferent to the truth. There is no escape from the conclusion that, if by the beast John meant Nero, he was mistaken. So we are told, "The author must have erred when he expected that in a short time Nero, as the antichrist, would return from Hades, and that his ap-

pearance would bring the end.”⁸⁰ A sentence perfectly correct if only we may substitute *if* for *when*. Plainly the early church did not consider John a false prophet.

(2) This theory confounds the beast with the head that was smitten, though John clearly distinguishes them. If the seven heads are literal kings, the beast must be the Roman empire. But, according to this view, Nero is now the head, and now the beast. “The proposed interpretation, by which the healing of the deadly wound is supposed to refer to the return of the dead Nero, is exegetically untenable, because a distinction is made in the most definite way between the beast, which, as with Daniel, represents a collective idea, and his heads, which symbolize individual kings; while for the first time (xvii. 11), the personification of the beast as such is indicated in an eighth ruler (and this did not occur under the heads) Similarly a distinction is made in the most definite way between the slaying of the one head, *i. e.*, the death of the one ruler, and the deadly wound which the beast has thereby received.”⁸¹

Upon the assumption that the heads are literal kings, Nero cannot be identified with the beast. We shall see presently that there is grave reason to doubt whether that assumption be itself correct. If the heads are kingdoms, Nero disappears at once from sight. In no case can he be denoted by the beast.

An attempt is made to preserve the theory, and yet save the credit of the prophet, by representing Domitian as the eighth king, who came in the spirit and power of Nero, and may therefore bear his name, as John the Baptist was called Elijah (Matt. xi. 14). The prediction was fulfilled, though not in the letter. Domitian was Nero revived.

To this form of the theory there are two fatal objections, the one historical, the other exegetical.

(a) Domitian was not the eighth king. Here it is convenient to insert the list of emperors from the beginning of

⁸⁰ Gebhardt, *Doct. of Apoc.*, *Introd.*, sect. 3, p. 13.

⁸¹ Weiss, *Bib. Theol.*, sect. 131, note 1.

the empire to the close of the first century. If, in order to give the view we are combating every possible advantage, we omit Julius Cæsar, we have—

1—Augustus.....	30 B. C.—14 A. D.
2—Tiberius.....	14 A. D.—37 A. D.
3—Caligula.....	37 A. D.—41 A. D.
4—Claudius.....	41 A. D.—54 A. D.
5—Nero.....	54 A. D.—68 A. D.
6—Galba.....	June, 68 A. D.—January, 69 A. D.
7—Otho.....	January—April, 69 A. D.
8—Vitellius.....	April—December, 69 A. D.
9—Vespasian.....	69 A. D.—79 A. D.
10—Titus.....	79 A. D.—81 A. D.
11—Domitian.....	81 A. D.—96 A. D.
12—Nerva.....	96 A. D.—98 A. D.
13—Trajan.....	98 A. D.—117 A. D.

It is proposed to make Domitian the eighth by omitting Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, as usurpers, whose tenure of power was brief. Appeal is made to the words of Suetonius, who begins his life of Vespasian—"Rebellionem trium principum et caede, incertum diu et quasi vagum imperium, suscepit firmavitque tandem gens Flavia." The question at issue is simply, Were they commonly reckoned among the emperors? The evidence is overwhelming. Suetonius himself includes them in the Lives of the Cæsars. Tacitus calls them all *principes*,⁸² and associates them with Domitian under this title. Josephus speaks of them all as emperors.⁸³ Eusebius says: "After Nero had held the government about thirteen years, Galba and Otho reigned about a year and six months."⁸⁴ Theophilus of Antioch (died about 181) gives a list of the emperors, and includes Julius Cæsar, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius.⁸⁵ Clement of Alexandria gives two lists. In the former, which he prefers, he includes Galba only of the three; in the latter he includes them all.⁸⁶ They

⁸² Hist., i. 2.

⁸³ B. J., Book iv. chap. ix. sects. 1, 9.

⁸⁴ H. E., Book iii. chap. v.

⁸⁵ Ad Antol., iii. 27.

⁸⁶ Strom., Book i. chap. xxi.

are all numbered by Tertullian,³⁷ and by Victorinus.³⁸

It is purely arbitrary to omit these names from the list of emperors. Canon Farrar regards Galba as the sixth emperor, under whom the book was written: "This is, indeed, the all but certain date of the book,"³⁹ but omits him subsequently with Otho and Vitellius, in order to make Domitian the eighth.⁴⁰ By altering the list of emperors at will, and even omitting at one time those who are included at another, it is possible to bring about any desired result; but we have no reason to attribute such manipulation to the apostle.

(b) The book teaches that after seven kings have fallen, the beast is himself an eighth, and goeth into perdition (xvii. 11). The beast is incarnate in the eighth, and in the eighth perishes. With the eighth the series closes, and the end comes. The beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire at the coming of the Lord (xix. 20). The destruction of the beast is linked with the end, whether it be the end of the Roman empire or the end of the world. This is generally recognized by expositors of all schools.

In what sense was this true of Domitian? How does he occupy a place of so great importance? If it be only the end of the Roman empire that is indicated, the theory is widely at fault, for the empire endured for centuries after eight emperors had fallen. The embodiment of the beast in the eighth marks a crisis which had no place in the reign of Domitian.

The conclusion is inevitable. If the theory is correct, John was mistaken. There are those who do not shrink from the logical result of their interpretation. Identifying the beast, that is, Nero, with antichrist, Bleek remarks: "So far as the appearing of Christ is connected with that of antichrist, we must say that the Apocalypse has sought to determine about

³⁷ Adv. Jud., chap. viii.

³⁸ Comm. on xvii. 10.

³⁹ Early Days of Christianity, chap. xxvii. sect. 1, p. 413.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. xxviii. sect. 6, p. 482.

the future of the Lord and the complete manifestation of his kingdom, both times and circumstances, in opposition to the declaration of the Lord, according to which the Father has reserved this to himself. Hence it is natural to think that the Apocalypse, apart from its other significance, can have no normative authority for us in these particulars."⁴¹ Gebhardt affirms that the seer expected Nero risen from the dead to march against Rome and destroy it.⁴² So Düsterdieck: "This eighth emperor [Domitian] John considers not only as the individual personification of the Roman antichrist, but also as the last possessor of the Roman dominion over the world; as in his person this finds its complete fulfilment, with him it also perishes."⁴³ And again, "John erred in the expectation that, with Domitian, the Roman empire would perish. The singular error proves, of course, a certain imperfection of prophetic character in the writer of the Apocalypse, yet by no means entirely annihilates it" (*Ibid.*, on xvii. 8-11). To most readers, applying the principle laid down in Deut. xviii. 22, the remnant of "prophetic character" is hardly visible.

Every form of the Nero-hypothesis is shattered against this fact, that the end comes with the eighth. So also is the theory which discovers in the beast the Roman empire, and in the seven heads the emperors. If that theory is correct, it is impossible to resist the conclusion of Weiss. "With the expiry of the series of seven-headed rulers, the development appointed for the Roman empire is now finished; the eighth, which then yet comes, can be but the final incarnation of antichristianity (*c*). Along with his royal helpers he will destroy even the chief city of the world, and will then be destroyed in the struggle with the returning Messiah (*d*)."⁴⁴ He says further that Domitian is the eighth; that with the provincial governors, symbolized by the ten horns (xiii. 1-

⁴¹ Lects. on Apoc., chap. iii. p. 105.

⁴² Doct. of Apoc., Part 3:7, p. 268.

⁴³ Com. on Apoc., Introd., sect. 3.

⁴⁴ Bibl. Theol. N. T., Vol. ii. sect. 131.

xvii. 3), he will destroy Rome with fire; that then Christ shall come forth against him, and annihilate forever the power of the empire. If the beast is the Roman empire, and the heads are emperors, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion.

Again we must ask, Is it possible that the early church held this understanding of the book, and yet gave it a place among their sacred writings? This is not a question of the nature and extent of inspiration, it is a simple question of historical probability. Can we believe that a prophecy proved to be false before the century expired was accepted by the church as the word of God? It is plain that in the judgment of the Christians of the first and second centuries John was not a false prophet.

The third passage relied upon to prove that the beast is Nero is xiii. 18: "He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six" (Rev. Ver.). These words have exercised the ingenuity of critics in every age of the church. Expositions fall into three classes:—

1. The number denotes the years of the beast. This was maintained by Bengel, who drew out an elaborate chronology of the book, identified the beast with the papacy, and foretold that the end would come in 1836.

2. The number is symbolical. The most common form of this view is that which sees in *six* the figure of human weakness and failure in contrast with the divine perfection, which is denoted by *seven*.

3. The number is the sum of the letters that compose the name of the beast. This is the prevailing mode of interpretation. It begins with Irenæus, who suggests *Teitan*, which he prefers, *Evanthas*, and *Lateinos*, the letters of each of which, according to their numerical value in the Greek, yield 666.⁴⁵ It is not possible even to mention the names that have since been discovered in this mystic number, which has been for centuries the arsenal of personal and sectarian

⁴⁵ Adv. Hær., Book v. chap xxx. sect. 3.

hatred. About fifty years ago the discovery was made simultaneously by several scholars that Nero Kæsar in the Hebrew yields the result 666. Moreover, Irenæus says that certain copies of the Apocalypse in his day read not 666, but 616,⁴⁶ and this variation gives Nero Kæsar. This solution has met with wide favor, and is urged with a degree of confidence which is by no means warranted by the facts.

For (1) it is a serious objection to this interpretation that it resorts to the Hebrew alphabet. The book was written in Greek, for Greek readers. It employs the Greek letters elsewhere as symbols (i. 8; xxi. 6; xxii. 13). Hebrew words are especially noted (ix. 11; xvi. 16). The early Christian writers never thought of seeking a solution in any other language than the Greek.⁴⁷

But it is said that Hebrew letters were employed for the sake of concealment. It was dangerous to pronounce the name of Nero, therefore John hid it beneath a disguise which would easily be penetrated by the believing Jew. But were there no unbelieving Jews? In this very region of Asia Minor the Jews played a prominent part in the martyrdom of Polycarp so late as the middle of the second century.⁴⁸ The early disciples had no keener antagonists, and it is difficult to see why the solution should not have been as easy to a Jew without, as to a Jew within, the church. At any rate it must have been conveyed by the believing Jews to their Gentile brethren, and thus have become the common property of the congregation.

Yet again, Why this necessity of concealment after the death of Nero? If Nero is the beast, then beyond question the destruction of Rome is indicated in the plainest possible manner in chapter xvii. If John could thus predict the downfall of the imperial city, he might have ventured to name the dead emperor.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, sect. 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, sect. 3; Hippol. on Christ and Antichrist, chap. l. Vict., Com. on xiii. 18.

⁴⁸ Eus., H. E., Book iv. chap. xv.

(2) A second objection has been already suggested. This interpretation is a novelty. There is not a trace of it to be found in the early church. If John's purpose was concealment, certainly he succeeded admirably, for his meaning was hidden not only from the enemies of the church, but from the church itself, for eighteen hundred years. It is simply incredible that if this solution is so simple, and if it was ever known to the church, it should have been absolutely forgotten until our time. The consolation supposed to have been designed for the Christians of the first century seems to have been reserved for the critics of the nineteenth.

We proceed to consider—

II.—*The evidence drawn from the general style and character of the book.*

The difference in style between the fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse is obvious to every reader. It was noted so long ago as the third century by Dionysius of Alexandria :—

We may also notice how the phraseology of the Gospel and the Epistle differs from the Apocalypse. For the former are written not only irreprehensibly, as it regards the Greek language, but are most elegant in diction, in the arguments and the whole structure of the style. It would require much to discover any barbarism or solecism, or any odd peculiarity of expression at all in them. For, as it is to be presumed, he was endued with all the requisites for his discourse; the Lord having granted him both that of knowledge and that of expression and style. That the latter, however, saw a revelation, and received knowledge and prophecy, I do not deny. But I perceive that his dialect and language is not very accurate Greek; but that he uses barbarous idioms, and in some places solecisms, which it is now unnecessary to select; for neither would I have any one suppose that I am saying these things by way of derision, but only with the view to point out the great difference between the writings of these men.⁴⁹

From this difference of style many modern critics argue with Dionysius that the Gospel and the Apocalypse must be referred to different authors. But we are now concerned with those who ascribe both writings to John, and find in this difference an argument for the early date of the Apocalypse. The style of the Gospel is more elegant, we are told, because it was written ten or twenty years, or even more, after

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Book vii. chap. xxv.

the prophecy, years which John had spent in Ephesus among a Greek-speaking people. Naturally he acquired greater fluency and correctness in the use of the Greek tongue.

To this it must be answered, in the first place, that the difference, though considerable, is often exaggerated. On the one hand the Gospel is good Greek because it is simple Greek. The vocabulary is limited, and the construction is of the simplest character. Canon Westcott says truly, after speaking of the sameness of phraseology which prevails throughout the Gospel, "This emphatic monotony is still more observable in the form and in the combination of the sentences. The constructions are habitually reduced to the simplest elements. To speak of St. John's Gospel as 'written in very pure Greek,' is altogether misleading. It is free from solecisms, because it avoids all idiomatic expressions. The grammar is that which is common to almost all language. Directness, circumstantiality, repetition, and personality are the characteristic marks of the separate sentences. And the sentences and thoughts are grouped together in a corresponding manner. They are coördinated and not subordinated. The sequence of the reasoning is not wrought out, but left for sympathetic interpretation."⁵⁰

And on the other hand the solecisms of the Apocalypse are not the result of ignorance. If it were possible to examine them in detail, we should find that in many cases the writer now follows and now forsakes the common usage; that his deviations, sometimes at least, are clearly intentional; and that his free handling of the Greek language indicates rather the familiarity of long acquaintance than the rude attempts of a novice.⁵¹

But however great the difference between the Gospel and the Apocalypse, it cannot be accounted for by lapse of time. If the Apocalypse was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, John must have been at least sixty years of age. He had probably been familiar with the Greek from

⁵⁰ Com. on Gospel of John, Introd., part ii. sect. 5.

⁵¹ See Winer's *New Testament Grammar*, sect. lix, 11.

his earliest years, for it was in common use in Palestine. His brother-disciples wrote it fluently and correctly, and there is no reason to suppose that his knowledge was inferior to theirs. We have no right to assume that he was incapable of using the Greek language with propriety at the earliest date that may be assigned. "The pure Greek of the Gospel was at one time thought not likely to have been used by the fisherman of the Lake of Gennesaret. No one doubts now that the lower classes in Galilee, coming as they did into daily contact with the Greek influence which surrounded them, and which had already penetrated the peculiar people, may have had a thorough knowledge of the Greek language."⁵²

And Professor Hadley says, "In view of these proofs, the conclusion seems unavoidable that, as a general fact, the Palestine Jews of the first century were acquainted with both languages, Greek and Aramaic."⁵³

The differences between Apocalypse and Gospel may not be easily explained, but the explanation must be psychological, not chronological. John wrote his visions in the Spirit, and after the model of Old Testament prophecy.

As little will the difference between the Gospel and the Revelation trouble us. It can no more be said that the language of each excludes that of the other, than that there is a progress from the confined speech of the Gospel to the free, arbitrary use of the same in the Revelation; or the reverse, that the Gospel shows greater correctness and purity in its Greek, gained by longer residence among Greeks. The difference lies in the subject, and in the thoroughly different psychological frame of the writer.⁵⁴

The difficulty will be relieved, at least in part, if we may suppose that John made use of an amanuensis in the composition of the Gospel, while he wrote the Apocalypse with his own hand.⁵⁵

⁵² Weiss, *Life of Christ*, Book i. chap. vi.; also Luthardt, *Com. on Gospel of John*, *Introd.* II. 4 (1). "Hence the disciples must be considered, as by birth, speakers of two languages."

⁵³ Smith's *Bib. Dict.*, article *Lang.* of the New Testament.

⁵⁴ Luthardt, *Com. on Gospel of John*, *Introd.* II. 4 (1).

⁵⁵ Salmon, *Introd. to New Testament*, *Lect.* xiii.; *Speaker's Com. Introd.* to I. Ep. of John, v.

It is urged that an old man could not have written the fiery pages of the Apocalypse. But if John wrote his Gospel in old age, there is no reason why he should not have written the Apocalypse at the same period of life. The Gospel gives no evidence that the fire and vigor of the "Son of thunder" were spent. Advancing years do not always bring decay of mental power. Moses and Isaiah witness to the contrary. Our own time has seen the veteran Ranke beginning a History of the World at the age of eighty-three. How precarious is this argument, Macaulay illustrates in his Essay on Lord Bacon:—

It rarely happens that the fancy and the judgment grow together. It happens still more rarely that the judgment grows faster than the fancy. This seems, however, to have been the case with Bacon. But in eloquence, in sweetness and variety of expression, and in richness of illustration, his later writings are far superior to those of his youth. In this respect the history of his mind bears some resemblance to the history of the mind of Burke. The treatise on "The Sublime and Beautiful," though written on a subject which the coldest metaphysician could hardly treat without being occasionally betrayed into florid writing, is the most unadorned of all Burke's works. It appeared when he was twenty-five or twenty-six. At fifty his rhetoric was quite as rich as good taste would permit; and when he died, at almost seventy, it had become ungracefully gorgeous. It is strange that the essay on "The Sublime and Beautiful," and the "Letter to a Noble Lord," should be the productions of one man. But it is far more strange that the essay should have been a production of his youth, and the letter of his old age.

The hand of age may sometimes wield the pen of youth.

It may be briefly noted that a marked dissimilarity in style between the Epistles of Peter is often urged against the genuineness of the Second Epistle. "The main difference is that the language of the First Epistle is somewhat rough and Hebraizing, while that of the second is more elegant and better Greek; the style of the second is more periodic, while in the first the connection of sentences is simple, and even clumsy."⁸

Yet it is generally agreed by those who accept both

⁸ Bleek, Introduction to the New Testament, sect. 219. Olshausen, Com. on New Testament, Vol 1. p. lxxviii.

Epistles as the work of Peter, that no considerable space of time could have elapsed between them—probably not more than four or five years. And here, too, the suggestion that the difference is due to the amanuensis is as old as Jerome.

It is further urged that the temper and spirit of the book are Jewish throughout, in strong contrast to the breadth and catholicity of the Gospel. And the reason is, that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem marked the close of the old economy, and gave the apostles a clearer view of the world-wide nature of their mission.

The argument is based upon simple misapprehension. Of necessity the Apocalypse is Jewish in form, for it employs the imagery of the Old Testament; but it is broadly catholic in spirit. Only by a literal interpretation of the symbols employed, which the whole character of the book forbids, can it be set at variance with the Gospel. The temple in chapter xi. is not the structure of Herod, nor are the Jews of chapter vii. the lineal descendants of Abraham. Jewish symbols are employed in the Christian sense. John speaks of the heavenly city as the new Jerusalem: so does Paul (Gal. iv. 26). John represents the New Testament church of God as the children of Israel: so does Paul (Gal. iii. 29). There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The multitude of the redeemed is gathered out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues (vii. 9). In heaven there is no temple, for God and the Lamb are the temple thereof (xxi. 22). Seven Gentile churches are addressed in the opening chapters as representative of the church universal. The Apocalypse is one in spirit with the Gospel. Like the Master, it wears the garb of the Jew, but the heart is the heart of the Son of man.

Again it is affirmed that in order of thought the Apocalypse precedes the Gospel. The argument is ably presented by Canon Westcott:—

The Apocalypse is doctrinally the uniting link between the Synoptists and the fourth Gospel. It offers the characteristic thoughts of the fourth Gospel in that form of development which belongs to the earliest apostolic

age. . . . The most striking contrast lies in the treatment of the doctrine of Christ's coming in the two books. This is the main subject of the Apocalypse, while it falls into the background in the Gospel and in the Epistles of John. In the Apocalypse the thought is of an outward coming for the open judgment of men: in the Gospel of a judgment which is spiritual and self-executing. In the Apocalypse the scene of the consummation is a renovated world: in the Gospel "the Father's house." In the former the victory and the transformation are from without, by might, and the "future" is painted under historic imagery: in the latter the victory and the transformation are from within, by a spiritual influence, and the "future" is present and eternal. . . . Of the two books the Apocalypse is the earlier. It is less developed both in thought and style. The material imagery in which it is composed includes the idea of progress in interpretation. The symbols are living. On the other hand, to go back from the teaching of the Gospel to that of the Apocalypse, to clothe clear thought in figures, to reduce the full expression of truth to its rudimentary beginnings, seems to involve a moral miracle, which would introduce confusion into life. . . . The Apocalypse is after the close of St. Paul's work. It shows in its mode of dealing with Old Testament figures a close connection with the Epistle to the Hebrews (2 Peter, Jude). And on the other hand it is before the destruction of Jerusalem.

The crisis of the fall of Jerusalem explains the relation of the Apocalypse to the Gospel. In the Apocalypse that "coming" of Christ was expected, and painted in figures: in the Gospel the coming is interpreted.⁵⁷

This argument is not easily answered in set terms, because it appeals with very different force to different minds. Professor Milligan, for example, one of the latest and ablest writers upon the book, says: "Let it once be granted that the key to the Apocalypse lies, where we have endeavored to find it, in the Gospel of St. John, and it will not be easy to suppose that the former appeared more than thirty years before the latter."⁵⁸ "The Apocalypse may without impropriety be spoken of as the complement of the fourth Gospel. It stands to it in a relation similar to that of the Acts of the Apostles to the Gospel of St. Luke, or of the Epistle to the Ephesians to that to the Colossians."⁵⁹

It must suffice to say that the Gospel deals in plain language because it treats of the historic past; the Apocalypse in figures because it treats of the prophetic future. If the

⁵⁷ Com. on Gospel of John—Introd. IV. 2.

⁵⁸ Lectures on Revelation, Appendix III.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, lect. ii.

one obeys the laws of historic, and the other of prophetic composition, the argument is reduced to the statement that the same author cannot write history first and prophecy afterward. A careful examination will show that the immaturity of the Apocalypse attaches only to the symbolic form of expression, and not to the substance of doctrine. The essential teaching of the Gospel and of the Apocalypse is the same, and there is no warrant here for the supposition that a considerable interval of time lay between them. Both are properly referred to the closing years of John's life.

It must be further borne in mind that the Gospel was preached long before it was committed to writing. So Eusebius tells us,⁶⁰ and so critics of to-day affirm. "There is every reason to believe that the fourth Gospel was shaped by the apostle in oral teaching long before it was published or committed to writing."⁶¹ The substance, though not the form, of the Gospel, preceded the earliest date that can be assigned to the Apocalypse. The order of thought corresponds to the order of event—first the fellowship with Christ in the flesh, then the vision of Christ in glory.

So inconclusive are the arguments drawn from the book in favor of the early date.

It is possible only to indicate very briefly the internal evidence in favor of the later date.

John was evidently on terms of long and familiar acquaintance with the seven churches. On the supposition that the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, it is difficult to find room for the growth of this intimate relation. It is natural to suppose that in accordance with the word of the Lord (Luke xxi. 20, 21) John would remain in the holy city until its doom drew near. Vespasian led his army into Palestine early in the year 67. Titus began the siege of the city in the spring of 70. We must then compress the jour-

⁶⁰ H. E., Book iii. chap. xxiv.

⁶¹ Westcott on Epistle of John, *Introd.* IV.; compare his *Commentary on Gospel of John*, *Introd.* II. 2.

ney from Jerusalem, the abode in Ephesus, and the exile in Patmos within the space of two or three years.

But we are not left wholly to conjecture. We have evidence drawn from other portions of the Scriptures. It is generally agreed that John could not have made his home in Ephesus before Paul wrote to Timothy, who was bishop in that city, for no reference is made to him in either Epistle. Now if with Godet, Lange, Farrar, Ellicott, Alford, and Conybeare and Howson, following the indications of Eusebius,⁶² the Muratorian Canon, and Clement of Rome (Ep. c. 5), we assign Second Timothy to the year 66, 67, or 68, we must confine John's acquaintance with these churches within very narrow limits. Especially is this true if, with most critics who advocate the early date, we should fix the composition of the Apocalypse under Galba (June, 68—January, 69). Certainly these considerations are not decisive, for we know too little of John's life after the ascension to speak with confidence; but probability here is strongly in favor of the later date.

The condition of the seven churches as described in the opening chapters points in the same direction. Though we may discover in Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians the germs of the evils portrayed in the seven epistles, yet time is required for such development as is here attained—the lamentable growth of heresy which appears throughout; the loss of the first love in the church in Ephesus (ii. 4), and the threat of extinction (ii. 5); the rise of the sect of the Nicolaitans (ii. 6–15); the church in Sardis having "a name that thou livest, and art dead" (iii. 1); the church in Laodicea lukewarm, and about to be spued out of the mouth of God (iii. 16). Again, the argument is not decisive. So great a change might have been wrought in the course of a few years, but it is far more natural to suppose a considerable interval of time, the rise of a new generation. Thus we read in the Old Testament that "the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders

⁶² H. E., Book ii. chap. xxli.

that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord that he had wrought for Israel. . . . And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the work which he had wrought for Israel. And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baalim" (Judges ii. 7-11). It is probable that John addressed a different generation from that to which Paul wrote.

We cannot lay much stress upon arguments drawn from ecclesiastical terms and usages, for great obscurity hangs over the history of the church during the latter half of the century. Professor Godet urges (1) the ecclesiastical organization presupposed by the Apocalypse. The angel is the bishop. "The Apocalypse brings before us the period of transition from the primitive presbyterian constitution to the monarchic organization which is universally admitted to have prevailed in the second century." (2) "This custom [of public reading and hearing—i. 3] did not exist, as a received form, before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, and consequently the Apocalypse, which implies the use of this custom, cannot have been composed in the year 68." (3) "The expression, *the Lord's day* (i. 10), is of purely Christian origin, belonging to the ecclesiastical and technical language of the later times of the apostolic age, when the church had broken off all connection with the synagogue. Accordingly we find it only in the writings of the second century. The date indicated by Irenæus is the only one compatible with the use of this expression." (4) "Again the name given to *the Jews* in the Apocalypse will not allow us to suppose that this book was written before the great judgment of God upon Jerusalem. They are called (ii. 9 and iii. 9) *the synagogue of Satan*. What Christian author—especially what Judæo-Christian writer, such as the author of the Apocalypse must have been—would have allowed himself to brand with such a name the chosen people, before God had finally broken with them? . . . No, nothing but

an event of so decisive a nature as the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation can explain so novel a manner of speech with respect to the ancient people of God." ⁶³ While we cannot attach decisive weight to these considerations, yet for the most part at least they lend additional probability to the view we advocate.

Many matters of great interest and importance, preëminently the relation of this book to the prophecy of Daniel and to the discourses of our Lord concerning the last days, we must pass by without a word, and proceed to sum up the results of our investigation.

We are led by our survey of the evidence to this conclusion—the book contains no clear indication of the date at which it was composed. We are driven back upon the testimony of the early church, and that, as we have seen, pronounces clearly and strongly in favor of the reign of Domitian. We will not abandon this solid ground to follow the vagaries of modern criticism, which professes to furnish the historic setting of the prophetic picture by forsaking the only historic evidence we possess. A sober exegesis will take its departure from the standpoint of well attested and trustworthy tradition.

"The writings of John form a trilogy. The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse, represent the evangelic founding, the organic shaping, and the eternal future of the church; Christ who was, and is, and is to come." ⁶⁴ John "has bequeathed to the world three works, in which he has exalted to their sublime perfection those three supreme intuitions in the Christian life:—that of the person of Christ, in the Gospel; that of the individual believer, in the first Epistle; and that of the church, in the Apocalypse. Under three aspects, the same theme—the divine life realized in man, eternity filling time." ⁶⁵ Bernard has shown with admirable clear-

⁶³ *Bibl. Stud.* in N. T., pp. 336-340. Quoted with approbation by Archdeacon Lee in *Speaker's Comm. on Revelation*, *Introd.* sect. 4 b.

⁶⁴ *Lange's Com. on Gospel of John*, *Introd.* sect. 2.

⁶⁵ *Godet, Com. on Gospel of John*, *Introd.*, Book i. vi.

ness that the Apocalypse "is the consummation of the sure word of prophecy which pervades the Bible as a whole," and also that the doctrine of the church "is not perfected in the Epistles, but demands such a continuance and such a close as it receives in the Apocalypse."⁶⁶ Wisely the church has placed the Apocalypse at the close of the sacred canon. There it properly belongs, perhaps in order of time, certainly in order of thought. The New Testament, like the Old, closes with prophecy. Scripture is always pointing forward.

We must seek a more spiritual understanding of this book, and must recognize in it not the fortunes of individuals, of sects, or even of nations, so much as the conflict of eternal principles, the strife of the kingdom of God with all ungodly power. Bengel said of the Apocalypse: "Without tears it was not written; without tears it cannot be understood." With yet greater truth may we say, It was written in the Spirit; in the Spirit it must be interpreted.

⁶⁶ Prog. of Doct., sect. viii.